



February 29, 2016

## For Jail Diversion Enrollees, a Light through the Mist

By Michael Wilson



The Percy Village care center in Boyle Heights, one of the community diversion locations for MIST enrollees.

### A Message From the Director

This issue of Fast Facts makes me feel especially proud. In so many ways our organization is increasingly focused on those people who need us the most.

The people in the MIST program are suffering from mental illness so severe that they cannot even understand the court process well enough to have their day in court—a deeply held American right. So they languish in jail, having never been found guilty of a crime and yet staying longer than others who have been found guilty, simply because their mental illness prevents them from going before a judge. But not anymore. Dr. Ochoa, the medical director of the Office of Diversion and Reentry, has been working collaboratively with the judges, sheriff and mental health staff to get these people the treatment they need so they can have their day in court and move on with their lives.

I was equally proud to be with Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas as he cut the ribbon at the grand opening of the Recuperative Center. His vision of a full continuum of services has come true as we now have an outpatient center, a community hospital, a mental health crisis center, a HUB clinic, an HIV specialty clinic, an inpatient psychiatric center, a public health center, Drew University, and a recuperative center all together. No longer will homeless patients needing ongoing care after hospitalization have to fend for themselves on the streets or in a shelter or wasting resources staying unnecessarily at a hospital when we can provide them the care they need at the Center.



Mitch Katz, MD

A 44 year-old woman, Michelle (not her real name), sits in a bleak high-observation housing unit at a County jail. She faces multiple misdemeanor charges for sleeping in a park after hours in violation of the city's municipal code. She's delusional, ill, and doesn't understand the charges against her. She spends almost every hour of the day in her single-person cell. Because she's been declared incompetent to stand trial, she may stay incarcerated for months until she's declared competent or passed the time of a maximum sentence. On any given day in L.A. County jails, there are about 4,000 people in mental health housing. Some are just like her facing misdemeanor charges who need treatment, but are stuck in a "no man's land" in the criminal justice system. "L.A. County Jail is the largest mental health institution in the world," says Kristen Ochoa, MD, MPH, medical director for the DHS Office of Diversion and Reentry.

Law enforcement officials decide whether an individual exhibiting problematic behaviors in the community should be brought to a treatment facility (such as a psychiatric emergency room) or booked and taken to jail. The Office of Diversion and Reentry is working on finding solutions to help law enforcement divert as many people as possible to care, avoiding arrest all together.

County health officials are now working with the Mental Health Court, law enforcement, the District Attorney and the Office of the Public Defender to change the path that Michelle and others like her face through a new project called the Misdemeanor Incompetent to Stand Trial Community-Based Restoration Program (MIST CBR). The aim is to move inmates into community care settings like Percy Village in Boyle Heights or Lone Star Enriched Residential Services in South L.A. where they can be followed intensively. The effort is part of a larger movement

(See 'MIST' on back)



### A Rock'n Experience Greets Olive View Patients

By Michael Wilson

What a difference a weekend makes for improving patient experience. With a little help from Rooms That Rock 4 Chemo (RTR4C), a San Francisco-based nonprofit, Olive View-UCLA Medical Center has transformed an ordinary oncology clinic into a bright and colorful haven.

RTR4C interior designers, volunteers, and artists created the tranquil space over a weekend last month using paint and stencil designs. The reimagined space features artwork and a "Wall of Courage" to support patients on their road to recovery and wellness.

"Everyone involved in this project had a singular goal in mind, which was to embrace this opportunity to give something back

(See 'ROOMS' on back)



# Recuperative Care Center Opens in South L.A.

By Michael Wilson

L.A. County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and community leaders opened the MLK Recuperative Care Center on February 17, a 100-bed facility run by the Department of Health Services (DHS). The facility is seen as a major step in decompressing DHS beds by providing a safe place for homeless patients to convalesce following a hospital stay. The Center will care for approximately 600 patients a year who will spend an average of four to six weeks there. For individuals with complex medical or behavioral health conditions, recuperative care can ease transition to permanent supportive housing by providing a stable environment off the streets where a variety of onsite services are offered.

“The Recuperative Care Center ensures that these medically-fragile persons receive the right level of TLC so they can recover and move on to more appropriate housing,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. “A path to recovery – that’s why we’re here.”

Housed in a rehabbed dormitory that once served medical residents, the Center is the latest addition to the MLK medical campus that includes an outpatient center, public health clinic, mental health urgent care center, psychiatric inpatient facility, and 130-bed private hospital.

“If you’re homeless and you’ve been discharged from the hospital you often don’t have anyone to treat your wounds, change the dressings or help you manage with a broken leg,” said Marc Trotz, director of DHS’ Housing for Health program. Trained nurses under the supervision of a physician will provide hot meals and assist

patients with activities of daily living, such as bathing, grooming, dressing, and wheel chair transfers. Case management services will be provided by partner agency JWHC and patients will get linked to health, mental health and substance use services. Patients will also receive help with benefits like Medi-Cal and General Relief and referrals to permanent housing providers. “Homeless shelters are not the right places to recover after a surgery or illness,” added DHS deputy director of community health and integrated programs, Mark Ghaly, MD. “When you think about continuity of care, recuperative beds have been a broken link in DHS. We want to ensure that our most vulnerable patients can get better in the right setting.”

Ghaly said a lack of suitable places to discharge homeless patients has bottlenecked hospital discharge planning and created financial challenges because government and private payers won’t pay for the cost of a hospital bed when it’s not medically necessary. L.A. County spends \$70 million a year on inpatient costs for the homeless. Having an appropriate setting to transition homeless patients to will shorten recovery time and provide the wrap-around services that break the cycle of chronic homelessness. High-cost services of hospitals, jails, and first responders can also be avoided.

In addition to recuperative care, the center will provide art and other healing services to patients to reduce stress and support community reintegration. DHS operates a similar 38-bed facility in East Rancho Dominguez.



(‘MIST’)



Kristen Ochoa, MD, MPH

occurring in justice systems across the U.S. to transition low-level offenders with behavioral health challenges out of jails and into treatment programs with supportive housing. Advocates say homelessness, poverty, substance abuse and mental health issues induce recidivism, not stop it.

“The ethos of diversion out of the criminal justice system and into treatment is that it takes place along a spectrum of opportunities for intervention,” says Ochoa. “You can divert some people before they are ever arrested, and others once they are already in jail.”

In the six months since the pilot began, over 90 individuals have been enrolled into MIST CBR and more than 70 have been conditionally released into community inpatient or outpatient settings. Ochoa sees her role as bringing the parties together to make the case and facilitate a release to the right care setting. Her background as a forensic psychiatrist has been instrumental in building bridges between the legal and clinical teams. “This effort has required partnerships that have never before existed in the County,” adds Ochoa. “It has required persons and departments to work out of their regular scope. Many new inter-departmental policies and relationships have been created to support this program.”

The MIST CBR program can provide a way out of jail for those already in the system. One area where health officials see upside potential is the creation of new sobering centers in areas like Skid Row for pre-booked diversion – facilities run by DHS where individuals with substance abuse and behavioral health issues could be transported in lieu of an arrest and away from a crowded DHS Psychiatric or Medical Emergency Department.

(‘ROOMS’)

to our patients,” said hospital oncologist Dr. Phillis Wu. The clinic serves about 2,000 low-income patients a year seeking treatment for breast, colon, lung, and other cancers. Hospital officials said the treatment rooms will provide patients and their families with a sense of calm and tranquility.

“We are excited to partner with Olive View-UCLA Medical Center to ‘rock’ our 18th clinic for oncology patients,” added RTR4C founder and executive director Nancy Ballard. “This ambitious project is one of our largest, and will undoubtedly



have a transformative effect on the patients who are treated – often for long periods of time – in these facilities and the caregivers who work in them.”

Through support from community and corporate sponsors, RTR4C has transformed 300 chemotherapy rooms in 18 facilities in the United States and El Salvador, offering patients and their loved ones respite from an often sterile and bleak environment. As the hospital atmosphere is improved, the patient’s emotional well-being is positively impacted. For more information, visit [www.roomsthatrock4chemo.org](http://www.roomsthatrock4chemo.org).

## Health Agency Virtual Town Hall Meeting - March 2

### Health Agency Virtual Town Hall Meeting

Wednesday • March 2, 2016 • 11:30am – 1pm

Join the leaders of the new L.A. County Health Agency and Labor Partners for a “Virtual Town Hall” hosted at the Health Services and Public Health Administration Auditorium located at 313 N. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, 90012. A reception with light refreshments will follow. DHS employees are invited to attend either virtually or in-person at the Health Services location with manager approval.

**Parking**

Free parking will be provided on a first-come basis; spaces are limited and carpooling/early arrival is encouraged. Enter the parking structure from the Figueroa Street entrance and inform attendant you are attending the “Town Hall.”

**Participate two ways**

- Join the panelists “live” at the Health Services and Public Health Administration Auditorium
- Participate “virtually” from one of the DHS locations listed below

**DHS Virtual Sites**

Alhambra: Conference Room G03  
El Monte: Room 2269  
Ferguson: Ferguson Auditorium  
Harbor: Parlow Library  
Hudson: Room 2269  
Long Beach: Room 210  
High Desert: Room CR 11B  
Humphrey: Room 2227  
LAC+USC: Inpatient Tower 2P 216 & Building 10  
Mid Valley: Room 530  
MLK: Terrace Conference Room  
Olive View: Conference Room Fishbowl  
Rancho: Building SSA Room 1150  
Roybal: Room 2268

**Ask Questions**

Email your questions to the Health Agency speakers in advance to [ask@dhs.lacounty.gov](mailto:ask@dhs.lacounty.gov). QR code to the Health Services Auditorium. Due the high number of virtual participation sites, questions can only be taken by participants in the Auditorium or submitted by email in advance; emailed questions will be selected randomly and presented to Health Agency speakers during the session.

**See you there!**

[Click here for details](#)

## FAST FACTS From Dr. Katz

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